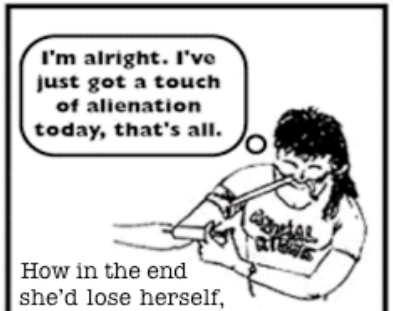
When the Left told Jane how ideology would sort her head out, make things clearer, and make her feel good about herself, what they didn't tell her was how lousy it would make her feel too...

How, slowly, she'd come to see things more and more through a narrow, single-minded perspective, how gradually all her thinking would be done for her, how the ideology would become the most demanding aspect of her life...

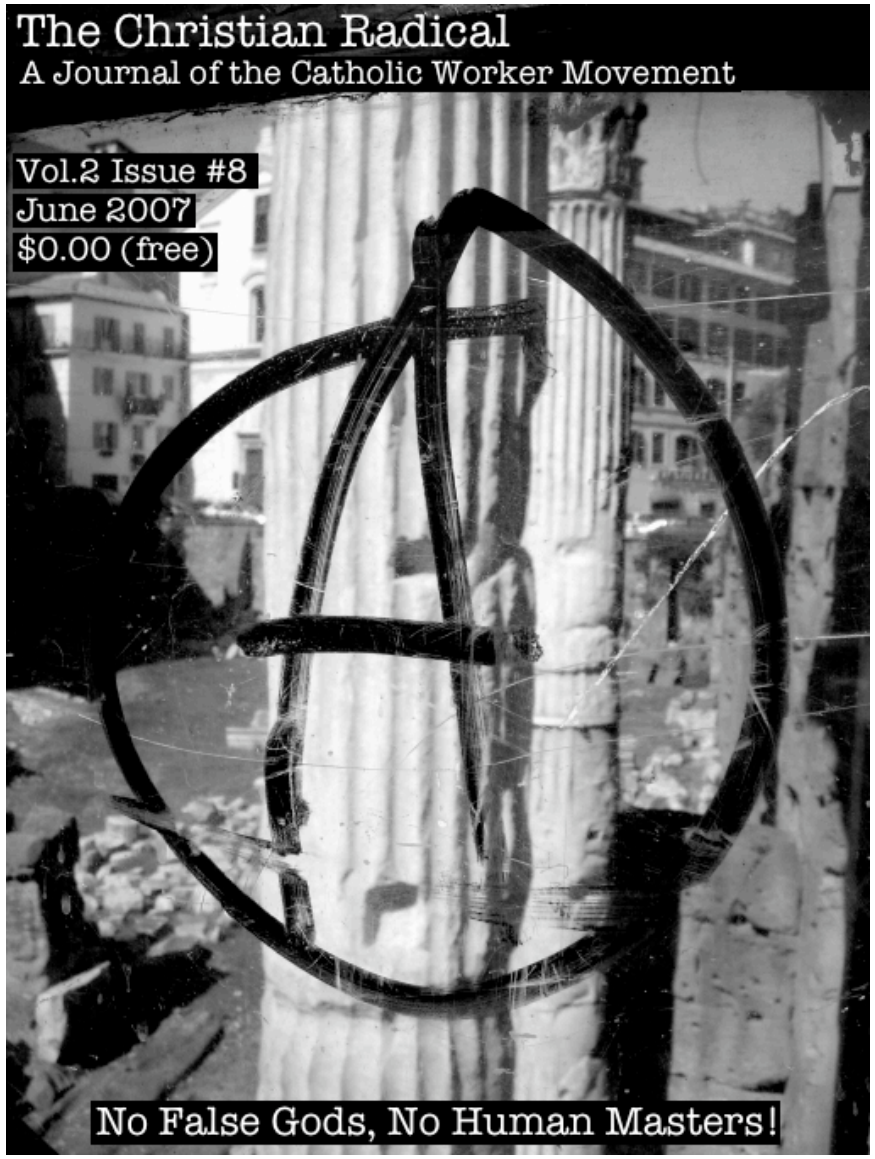
EVERYONE THINKS THEY CAN CONTROL IDEOLOGY
UNTIL IT STARTS TO CONTROL THEM

How she'd start to be identified not as an individual but by her ideological beliefs, how she'd lose her sense of humour and her non-ideologue friends...



How in the end she'd lose herself, dragged down into the abstract cocoon of ideology, into a mere shadow of her potential, having merely swapped one form of alienation for another.

THINKING FOR YOURSELF - WHEN YOU HAVE IDEAS
IDEOLOGY - WHEN IDEAS HAVE YOU



Contents:

Let There Be Light
By J. Barrett Lee

Small Sea Shell Song
By Melissa Sillitoe

Statement of Faith
By Logan Laituri

Story of a Coliseum Saint
By Chris Rooney

Why Are They Swine?
By Steven Woods

Military Inspired Violence
By Chris Kessing

The War Prayer
By Mark Twain

Right or Wrong, An Easy Essay
By Peter Maurin

We Believe So We Speak
Credits and Thanks

Useful links and places:

-Catholic Worker Websites:
www.catholicworker.com
www.catholicworker.org
www.lacatholicworker.org
www.ca.geocities.com/vancouvercatholicworker
www.catholicworker.com/bookstore/index.html
www.cjd.org

-Radical/Progressive Christianity
www.jesusradicals.org
www.nonviolentjesus.blogspot.com
www.geezmagazine.org
www.catholicanarchy.org
www.anglocatholicsocialism.org
www.tierra-nueva.org
www.romancatholicwomenpriests.com
www.desertwisdom.org/dttw

-Anti-War
www.stopwar.ca
www.ivaw.net
www.serve.com/nukeresister
www.resisters.ca
www.wri-irg.org
www.plowsharesactions.org
www.cpt.org

-Activism
www.foodnotbombs.net
www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook
www.iww.org
www.deathpenalty.org
www.freegan.info/?page=home
www.justicia4migrantworkers.org
www.drivemovement.org
www.streamsofjustice.org

-Other Good Websites:
www.vancouverdiy.com
www.pcac.net/indexn.html *(Palestinian Child Arts Centre)*
www.southcentralfarmers.com
www.commongroundrelief.org
www.teachingforpeace,org
www.jonahhouse.org
www.primitivism.com

Let There Be Light

J. Barrett Lee

In the beginning, all is darkness, chaos and a violent void. A vast, tumultuous sea rages underneath a starless night. There is no life here. There is no hope here. But God is present.

When the time is right, God speaks, and the tiniest light bursts forth upon the scene. Neither bigger nor brighter than a candle flame, it is nevertheless blinding against the backdrop of total blackness. With those first words, "Let there be light", God begins his creative work, bringing light to darkness and order to chaos.

This opening scene presents its readers with a theme that reverberates throughout Genesis. For the remainder of the book, God continues his creative work, bringing light to darkness and order to chaos. We catch the scent of this theme again in the family stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abram and Sarai, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and his family, and finally in the story of Joseph. Each generation faces insurmountable odds and each time, the reader asks the question, "Is this it? Have things finally got so out of hand that God is unable to fulfill his promises? Does this great work of creation end with us?" And in each generation, God comes through in the end. Somehow, the darkness is always pushed back by the shining light. Joseph sums it up in the closing chapter of the book: "What you intended for evil, God intended for good."

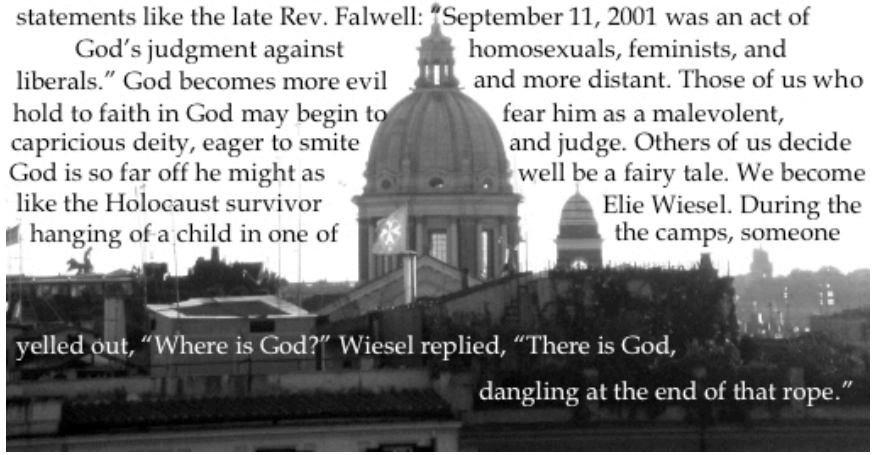
While most of us would accept this proposition in an abstract sense, the lesson lies in what Genesis teaches us about God's methods. God operates by shaping chaos, rather than by sovereign decree. Just as the world emerges slowly and rhythmically out of the primordial ocean, God's good intentions are brought to bear through process, rather than event. God's creative process is a subversive revolution, undermining the darkness and chaos.

Furthermore, God's creative process is ongoing. You and I live in the midst of a world that is not fully formed. Darkness and chaos still loom over our common existence, threatening us all with sudden annihilation or gradual entropy. We are encamped upon a precipice, leaning over a chasm that presents us with the possibility of descent back into chaos.

We gaze into this chasm nightly as we watch news reports on war, disaster, famine, and death. The international scene is chaotic in nature. Large, wealthy nations act unilaterally to force their will upon smaller, poorer nations through violence or exploitation. There is no order of consensus, only hoarding amid chaos.

We as Christians wail into this abyss crying, "Where is God?" There is no evidence of a creative process at work here; there appears to be no light in the darkness. Many theologians have looked for God in the machine itself. God is omnipotent and sovereign, they say. Surely, God Almighty has *willed* this tragic state of affairs for his own purposes, and our duty is to obey the authorities, which have been placed over us by divine decree. This line of thinking stems directly from the Protestant Reformation, which depended largely upon support from budding nation-states for its early survival.

However, I find the assumption of God's omnipotence to be unhelpful. When we are frightened by the evening news, we may comfort ourselves saying, "God is in control. Everything happens for a reason. This must be God's will." However, these platitudes make the Author of Life an Accessory to Murder. God gets twisted. We end up asking questions like "Why didn't God stop the Holocaust?" We might also end up making statements like the late Rev. Falwell: "September 11, 2001 was an act of God's judgment against homosexuals, feminists, and liberals." God becomes more evil and more distant. Those of us who hold to faith in God may begin to fear him as a malevolent, capricious deity, eager to smite and judge. Others of us decide God is so far off he might as well be a fairy tale. We become like the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. During the hanging of a child in one of the camps, someone yelled out, "Where is God?" Wiesel replied, "There is God, dangling at the end of that rope."



If we hold to a theology that prioritizes God's omnipotence, I fear we may end in one of the two aforementioned places: embracing chaos or lost in it. However, we can adjust our theology to view God as the creative shaper of chaos in an ongoing process. God has given creation a will of its own. Creation may work with or against him. The relationship between God and the universe is dynamic and growing, and there is more than one will at work. In painter's terms, the universe resembles the work of Jackson Pollock rather than that of Thomas Kinkade.

I believe that God will influence, but never override freewill. When things do not go God's way, he adjusts his plans to move forward along a new path. With each resistance comes a new adjustment. I believe God is able to see all possibilities on the chessboard of the universe. I also believe God can be trusted to bring his creation to its final destination in the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. As one seminary professor put it, "God draws straight with crooked lines."

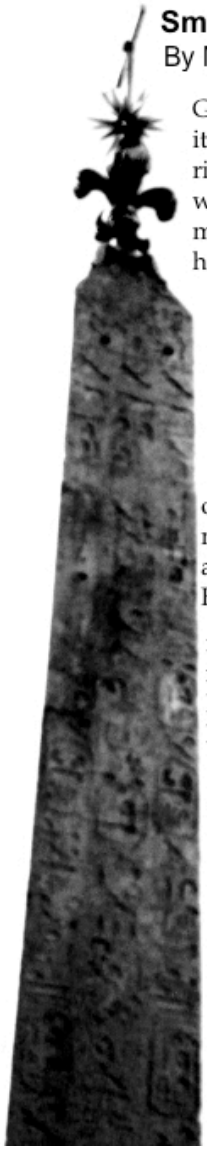
Resistance to his will can come from the random chaos of the universe, structural and personal human evil, or even a spiritual malevolence (which Christians refer to as Satan, the Devil, or the demonic). All of these stem from God making room for others in his creative process. I believe he did this because freedom, while limiting God's power, creates the possibility for a genuine, loving relationship between God and creation.

God's will was not shown forth in the tragedies of the Holocaust or September 11. Rather, God's will was at work in the German citizens who hid Jews in their attics and the FDNY firefighters who risked their lives in an attempt to help others.

We play a part in God's creative process. We can cooperate with it, or work against it in favor of chaos. If we let him, God will work with us and through us to shape the world.

We are God's coworkers. Like God, we have our own creativity and our own words at our disposal. As God created, so we can create. As God spoke, so we can speak. We can paint, sculpt, photograph, cry out, sing, pray, embrace, proclaim, preach, teach, heal, feed, picket, clothe, shelter, visit, laugh, kiss, clean, build, and above all, love. The possibilities available to us are nearly endless.

Each day is a new beginning. And at each new beginning, we awake to new reports of darkness and chaos threatening to undo God's creation. But God is still present. God is still speaking. And God's light is still bursting forth upon the scene. So let us hold fast to our faith, saying "Amen!" to the proclamation from John's Gospel, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." <



Small Seashell Song

By Melissa Sillitoe

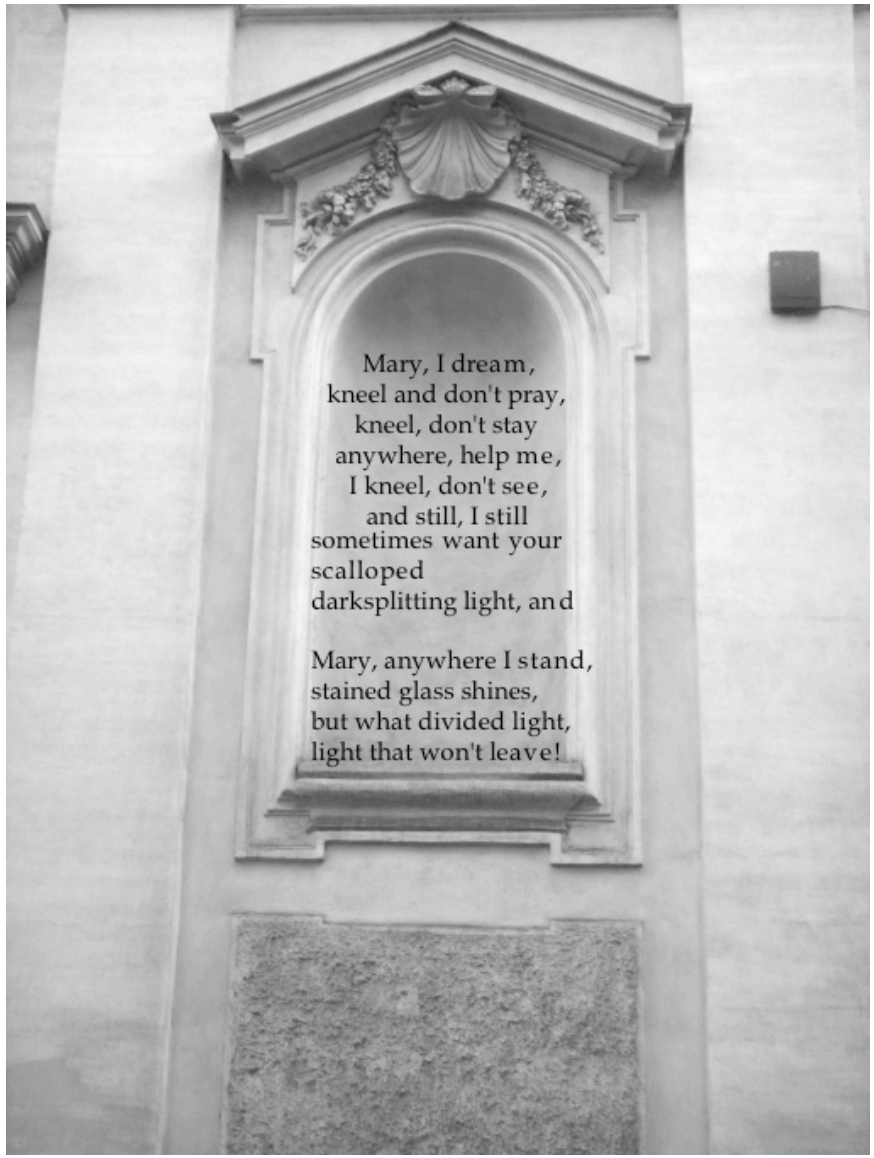
God, help me,
it's all your fault,
right? Your fault I write,
won't write, your fault
my dark dark canyoned
heart wants light.

One small lunch hour,
waves found landlocked
Salt Lake! Mary Magdalene's
Cathedral became polished
shell, I gripped
salt-stained, driftwood pew,

ocean pulsed,
my own heartbeat,
again, again.
Five, ten

minutes (And I thought, oh god,
now what?)
I didn't invite waves!
Not these. I mean,

sure, I knew canyons,
red rock, seasons
that burn, freeze.
God that sneers, hides
above snowline,
Instead, I found you,
gull-song echo,
hushed, hushed sea-roar,
back and forth tides.



Mary, I dream,
kneel and don't pray,
kneel, don't stay
anywhere, help me,
I kneel, don't see,
and still, I still
sometimes want your
scalloped
darksplitting light, and

Mary, anywhere I stand,
stained glass shines,
but what divided light,
light that won't leave!

Statement of Faith

By Logan Laituri

I am not a man of great significance. With every new dawn, I realize ever-increasingly that I am but a reluctant and unwilling cog in a great mechanism whose course is wholly unaltered by such singular workings of any man or woman. Every day at dusk, I look at my day's work and know without question that no single effort has or will contribute to the rebirth of a system that is currently caught up in apathy, complacency and ignorance.

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It is not out of anger or any amount of contempt that I am compelled to act in the way I do. I know the wounds that these tactics inflict, the pain and suffering they cause. My words and deeds are motivated solely by indiscriminate love for both the casualties of, and contributors to a culture that deprives creation of its inherent dignity and respect granted by the Creator. The culture I refer to, of course, is my own.

My foundational convictions are rooted in my deep patriotism and love for the country that has formed me. I cannot deny that I am, unalterably and undeniably American. However, my identity does not primarily rest upon its rootedness as an American, but as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am first and foremost seeking and pursuing the Kingdom of God. The advancement of freedom and democracy are secondary endeavors to my witness as a child of God. I am an American only after I understand myself and any other human being as a blessed creation of the Divine.

I have become convinced that we do indeed require soldiers for God. I readily confess that evil does exist in our world. However, if we as Christians see that evil as manifested by fellow human beings, the battle has taken its first step toward defeat. We have been deceived by the one true source of evil in the world, an Enemy that is not subdued by shock and awe, but by true love. This foe is not driven from the world by smart bombs and munitions, but by weapons of the gospel such as readiness, truth, righteousness, and faith.

The good fight we face is never amongst one another, against fellow children of God. To deny the creation of any other brother or sister is an implicit form of atheism. It is to deny that God is the shared source of life and being for every human regardless of race, nationality, or religion. It is because of this shared nature of being created 'very good' that we must honor the divine reflection in all human life. It is because of this conviction that I refer to myself both as a Christian soldier and a conscientious objector.

Despite the familiar rhetoric so prevalent in the American consciousness, I fail to confess our country as spiritually or morally superior to any other. I have watched idly as my fellow countrymen have forgotten and ignored the humanity of those we were taught to hate. I have listened unmoved to countless appeals to my own humanity by members of unfamiliar religions, cultures, and worldviews. And I have obeyed blindly men who have no more authority than you or I have to end a life created, nurtured, and protected by a God who hears the cries and shares the wounds of the victims of our country's violence, and worse, our negligence.

Do Christians have a place participating in war? Of course; Disciples of Jesus have for millennia found themselves on the battlefield. Confusing, though, is the fact that the most sincere and faithful of our number have predominantly had the battlefield brought to their tranquil fields by the very same ambitious characters that confess the same Prince of Peace as Lord. It is by the hand of these self-proclaimed 'Christian Soldiers' that many martyrs met their demise, a defeat by the standards the world holds. Today we find ourselves in a similar conundrum. Christians worldwide face oppression and hardship by the hands of the self proclaimed 'only super power.' In countless nations, the cry from our brothers and sisters has been to awake from our moral and ethical slumber; to realize our destructive and reckless ways and turn from them.

It is in our most earnest and sincere collective interest, as Americans, not to continue in selfish ambition and vain conceit, but consider in humility others better than ourselves. It is my duty as both a follower of Christ and as a patriotic American to undo the betrayal of my own silence and speak not against my fellow Americans, but in concern and love not only for our own longevity and security, but for our neighbors' as well.

In the sense that God's love is pro-active not re-active, unconditional not discriminatory, that I call myself a soldier of God. The weapons I use are not of our world, for our world collectively rejects the ways of true and lasting peace and justice. We have adopted vengeful over redemptive justice, condemnation over compassion. We curiously accept the gift of grace as our exclusive right while we deny the same gift to the enemy we are commanded to love just as God first loved us. Our enemies are no more evil to us than we were once to God, and they deserve to be offered grace just as we were granted it. Let God forgive us only in as much as we forgive others.

It is in this sense that I also identify myself as a conscientious objector. Far from being a pacifist, which unfortunately implies flaccid passivity at worst and opportunistic peacekeeping at best, I seek to advance the non-violent front of God's Kingdom with all my will and imagination. True peacemaking surpasses response to conflict; it creates ways of tending to the root of the disease, which is fear and hatred, instead of treating merely the symptoms, which are manifested by violence and hostility. In the spirit of love, we must be willfully and intentionally against using death as a means of loving our neighbor. Love causes no harm to its neighbor, instead forcefully driving out fear. This is the good fight of the faith, which is a faith not worth killing, but dying for.

The prophet Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony. In this, he is appallingly correct. In standing firmly upon our moral and ethical convictions, by pursuing and proclaiming peace above prejudice, we face harassment, isolation and rejection. In a society that insists that it embraces and celebrates the inherent equality of all men and women, we will be condemned for suggesting that such respect and dignity is deserved and needed even by those who would wish to do us harm.

Robert F. Kennedy spoke of communism, but we would do well to confer his teachings to our modern peril of terrorism. He told students at Capetown University "The denial of freedom in any name only strengthens the very communism it claims to oppose." So it was for Mr. Kennedy and Dr. King, so it is for any preacher of peace in our current state of affairs. Any threat to our privilege and tranquility is labeled as terrorist, even as brothers and sisters trembling under the threat of American terrorism see a "Christian nation" withholding for themselves any hope of peace or providence.

Of the familiar traits of those great orators and activists, one tradition must be altered. No longer must we look upon like persons and proclaim our people, but we must now look upon the entire global community and boldly declare all people. We as Americans have the great power, and necessarily the great burden, to speak for the victims of our own avarice and complacency. It is not from the peripheries and margins that we must speak and act, but from our own perches, pulpits, podiums and pedestals. It is within the very belly of the beast that rumblings and growls are not just heard and felt, but remedied as well.

In acknowledging our complicity, we take the first step toward rectifying our complacency. Should we wash our hands disgustedly, we surrender the only true power we might have to effect change. As we piously withdraw from our position of perceived privilege, we embody the very assumption of superiority we wish to depart from. We thank God for not being like our enemy. In fleeing our fears we quickly become exactly that which we fear the most. Separatists become elitists, defenders of freedom violate human rights, and a nation ideologically founded on Christ's pillars of humility and love becomes known for arrogance and greed.

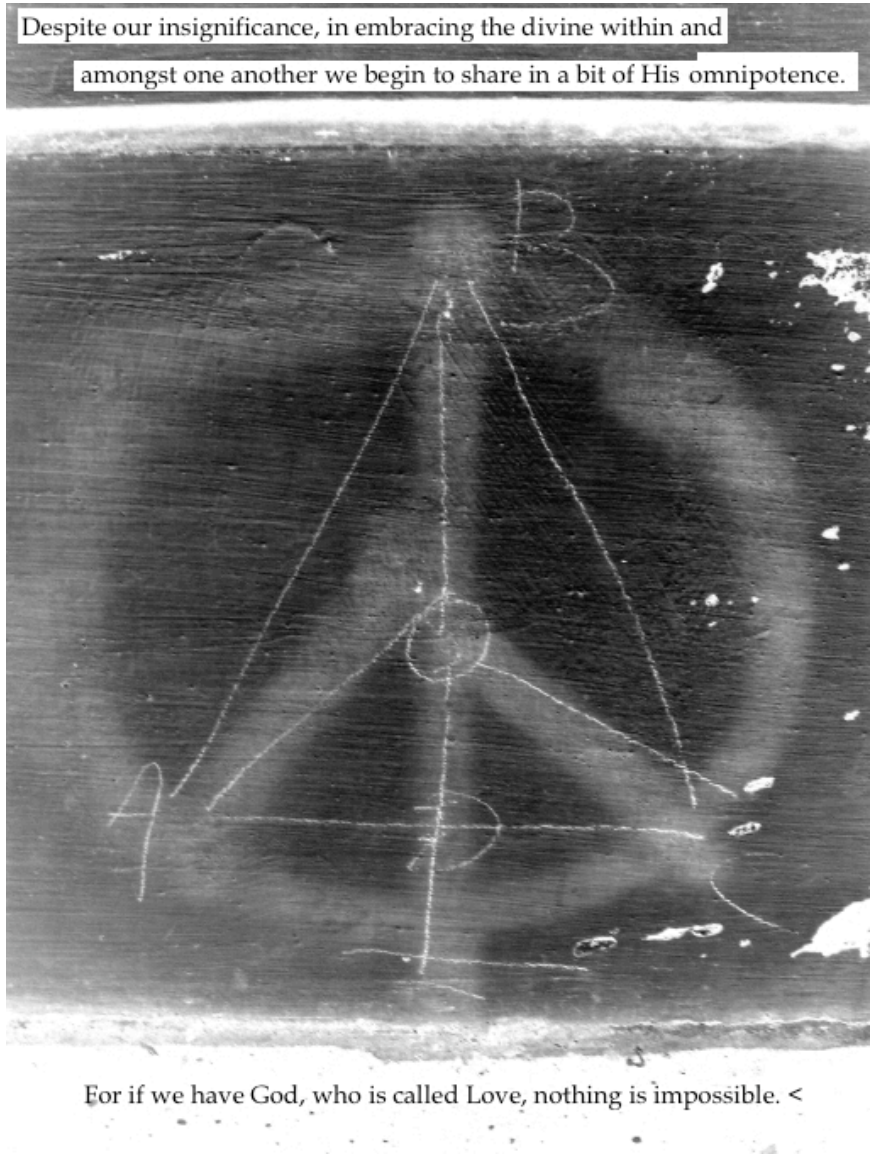
We must take action to remedy our own shortcomings and failures. Love for our country demands that we speak out when our governing bodies fail to be accountable to the very people they serve. Blind obedience, on the other hand, demands we stay the course and quiet our genuine concern for where such a course will lead. Such concessions are not patriotic, instead coming dangerously close to despotic. Against the threat of such imposed silence we must speak, even if our voices shake. Love calls a spade a spade, gently and reverently evoking integrity instead of intimidation.

However, it is not so much speaking the truth to power that compels and fascinates people, but living it out despite such powers. With just as much fervor and passion we pour into our hopes and passions, we must transform our words into actions. With every ounce of our strength that we tap to achieve our dreams, we must match it equally with our humble and enduring witness in our everyday lives. We must be and enact the change we dream of, we must break them forth into the world around us. Robert F. Kennedy suggested that some men look at things the way they are and ask why, prophetically reminding us to dream of things that never were and ask why not. We must now go one step further, and see how things should be and ask why not now?

In as much as we relegate true peace, justice, and love to dreams and ideals, we commit this, the fuel of our lives, forever to the realm of unreality. A great man once said "Science has proven that we can live months without food, days without water, and minutes without air. But no man can live more than a few seconds without hope." A man dies long before he straps a bomb to his chest and takes his first step toward his target. The human spirit is suffocated by the enormous weight of apathy and ignorance perpetrated by the very men and women who have the ability and responsibility to relieve that pressure.

We must no longer passively wish, but actively create and change. We must see idealism as realistic and necessary. The realism of change only occurs once idealists become realists, when we stop entertaining thoughts and begin enacting dreams. It is not only possible, it is inevitable; God's Kingdom is breaking forth. It is not restricted to the red, white, and blue, but is represented by every color in the spectrum. Men and women have felt its presence and heard its whispers. This other world exists despite the pressures and powers that be. It is our charge as children of God to dance, skip, hope and dream this world into our own.

The frontlines of this Kingdom are not advanced by shock and awe, but by faith and humility. His soldiers do not use temporal weapons, they know mercy and truth are wielded infinitely more capably in their battle against an Enemy who uses lies to convince mothers and fathers that their shed tears will be dried by the spilt blood of neighbors in faraway lands. God's children abandon the ways of the world, beating their pistols into pruning shears and melting their grenades into gardening hoes; eager to seek and to share God's Kingdom on earth, as it is in Heaven.


Despite our insignificance, in embracing the divine within and
amongst one another we begin to share in a bit of His omnipotence.
For if we have God, who is called Love, nothing is impossible. <

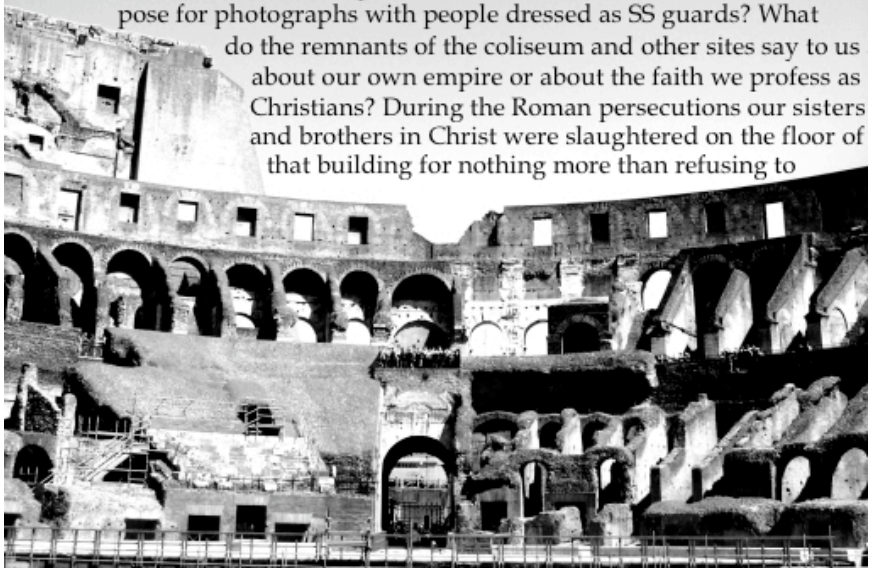
The Story of a Coliseum Saint.

By Chris Rooney

As I write this I'm on a train going to Perugia from Rome. I've been traveling in Italy with my family for the past week and Rome was an unexpected pilgrimage for me; but I'm not here to write about my trip so much as what was on my mind as I walked through the streets of Rome.

Our first day of sightseeing we visited the catacombs and then later I walked an hour from the hotel to the coliseum to meet up with a friend from Vancouver who was also in Rome. Visiting these sights of Christian martyrdom was profoundly moving for me. In many ways the catacomb church of the first three centuries was a foretaste of the beloved community. A church united in love and without aspirations to worldly power. A church community rooted in solidarity and the common experience of persecution, a church of subversive faith and hidden sanctity.

One thing I couldn't help but notice at the coliseum were the number of people dressed as gladiators and centurions posing for photo-ops with tourists. In two thousand years will the ruins of Buchenwald and Ravensbruk concentration camps be filled with Jewish tourists who will pose for photographs with people dressed as SS guards? What do the remnants of the coliseum and other sites say to us about our own empire or about the faith we profess as Christians? During the Roman persecutions our sisters and brothers in Christ were slaughtered on the floor of that building for nothing more than refusing to deny their faith in Christ and submit to the emperor's cult. How should one react to the practice of murder as entertainment? What does the coliseum say to us now about our own atrocious fixations? What does it tell us about our own crimes, the new crusades, the new camps, the genocide watched on the six o-clock news?



I want to tell you a story. It was told to me but I can't remember where or by whom, still it's worth retelling and I tell it often. This is how gladiatorial games were ended at the coliseum…

Under Constantine the persecutions ended and it was no longer a crime to profess one's faith publicly; at that time there was a Christian who spent his days protesting outside the coliseum. He was protesting against the practice of the death match, where slaves and criminals would square off against each other to kill or die on the floor of the coliseum for the roaring crowd. This Christian saw these games for what they really were, atrocity carried out in the name of entertainment and sanctioned by tradition and empire under the thin veil of some so-called justice.

This Christian had friends who didn't with his stand on violence and would go to the games when they could.

One day one of his friends convinced him that he ought to at least see what it was he was protesting against. After what could have only been hard weeks of convincing and objection he finally assented and let his friend buy him a ticket.

The two of them went and probably sat in the ancient world's equivalent of our nosebleed seats to watch the fights. After the first match, as the victorious gladiator was showboating for the crowd, the saint could no longer contain his distress at the slaughter. He stood up and fought his way through the crowd, down the stairs and right on to the floor of the ring, climbing over the rail and getting onto the floor he began to appeal in earnest to the cheering, laughing crowd. "Stop this, in the name of God stop this, it is murder," he must have cried and as he addressed the jeering people. The gladiator decided to roll with this unexpected turn of events and started gesturing to the crowd as to whether he should let the foolish Christian live, the madness of the crowd won out against individual conscience and the Christian was struck down and killed on the floor of the coliseum. By this point his friend, shocked and grieving would have cried out in horror as he watched his friend martyred, word started to spread through the crowd that the newly killed man was not some clown who was part of the show but was actually a member of the audience. I can only imagine what was going through the heads of the Roman people as they left the games that night but, as the story goes, that was the last time that gladiators ever fought in the coliseum.

As I walked through the ruins of that stadium I thought to myself about the martyr whose death I just told you about. I climbed the stairs to the upper balcony and tried to imagine what it must have been like in the year 400 and where he and his friend might have sat. I thought about how he must have fought the crowd to get to the floor and whether he met with any resistance as he climbed the ledge which separated the dead from the damned, and I thought again about the mock-gladiators outside making ends meet by dressing up for the tourists and wondered if any were Christians.

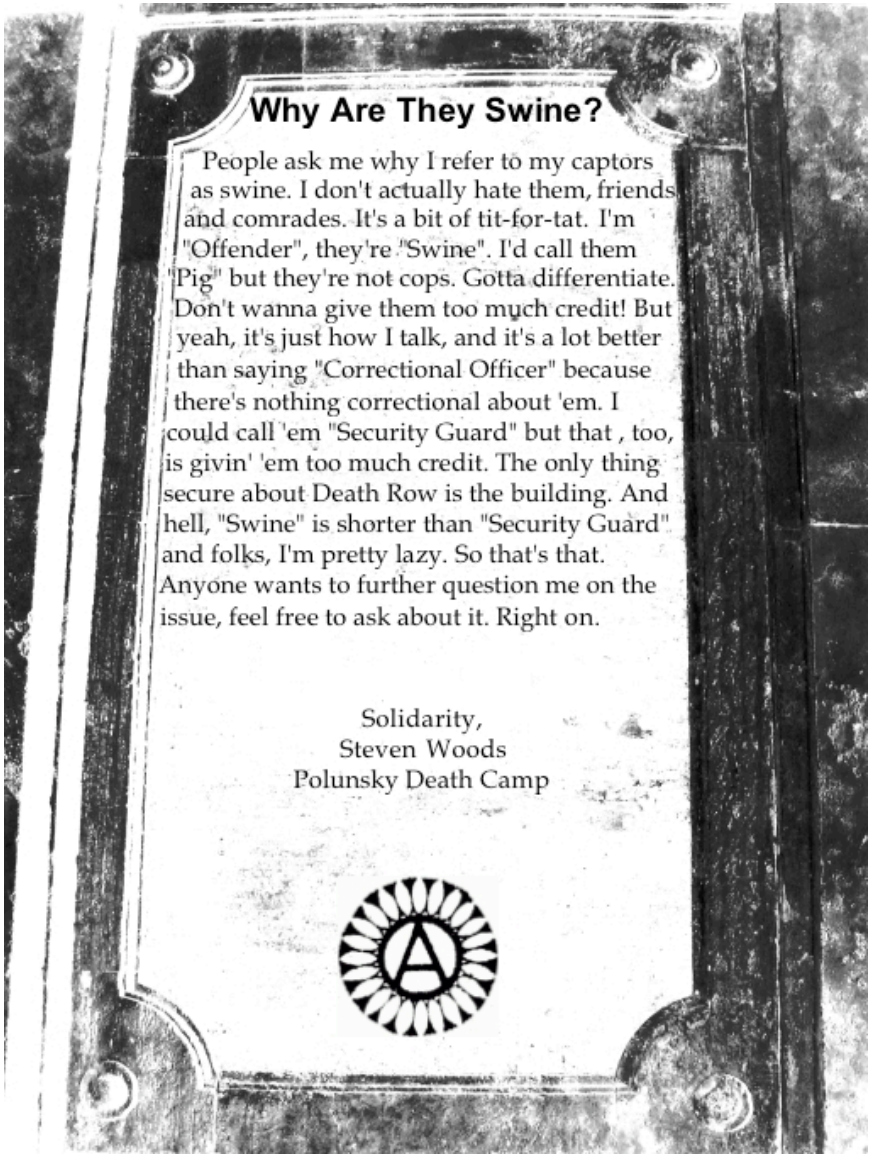
I can remember back in 2004 after Al Jazeera broadcast the first beheading in Iraq, I can remember the furor, which was caused on the internet, and in the Western media. I set myself to finding the film on the web so I could see what all the fuss was about. I didn't expect to find it and I certainly didn't expect what I saw. It wasn't as bloody as you'd think there was no drama, no mounting tension, none of the false dignity that we afford to executions in old movies, and none of the hammed up agony of murder scenes on TV. All there was, a man kneeling with his head in a bag and two other men standing over him their faces covered. A sword was raised and a head was felled, that was the end of the video clip.

Tragically I recall feeling nothing in particular, maybe a bit surprised that there was less blood than years of TV and slasher horror films had lead me to believe there'd be. There was some sadness that this was where we'd gone as a species but it wasn't for some two more years before the real horror of what I'd watched actually sunk in. Being a child of the end of the century I had just shrugged it off, that screen—whether it's a TV, a computer, or a cinema—renders it's subjects into fiction, the spectacle gives one license to witness then shrug off the murder of a man, a child, or a whole township, It gives people the feeling of immunity against the realities we see projected. Sure that blood might just be corn syrup and food colouring, sure that woman didn't really get raped by a drill, so what? It's just entertainment right?

In our modern age there's no stadium floor for the angered saint to climb down to. And if he could and was killed and his murder shown on YouTube, the most immediate feelings we might express would be aesthetic: there wasn't enough blood so it couldn't have been real; "That was nothing," one might say, or "you should have seen such and such film -- now *that* was stomach turning." "Did you see the execution of Saddam? I hear his second in command was so fat that when they hanged him his head popped right off, just like a daisy," and so on and so forth in the forums and cafés of the world.

One day the lights will go out for ever and the Internet and television and the horrors both real and pantomime which are archived therein will become a long distant memory and on that day we should rejoice, after that we'll be free and real communication can begin again. We will cease to do out imitation of Plato's Cave and learn how to live in the world once more. We would also do well to remember that until then our passivity and our acquiescence have let us become monstrous in the name of entertainment. We can stop the spectacle, but to do it we have to cease playing along. We have to choose to see the humanity in the faces of our neighbours, to see each other as icons of the living God and act in that reality.

Only when we can do that will the world really change. <


Why Are They Swine?
People ask me why I refer to my captors as swine. I don't actually hate them, friends and comrades. It's a bit of tit-for-tat. I'm "Offender", they're "Swine". I'd call them "Pig" but they're not cops. Gotta differentiate. Don't wanna give them too much credit! But yeah, it's just how I talk, and it's a lot better than saying "Correctional Officer" because there's nothing correctional about 'em. I could call 'em "Security Guard" but that , too, is givin' 'em too much credit. The only thing secure about Death Row is the building. And hell, "Swine" is shorter than "Security Guard" and folks, I'm pretty lazy. So that's that. Anyone wants to further question me on the issue, feel free to ask about it. Right on.
Solidarity,
Steven Woods
Polunsky Death Camp

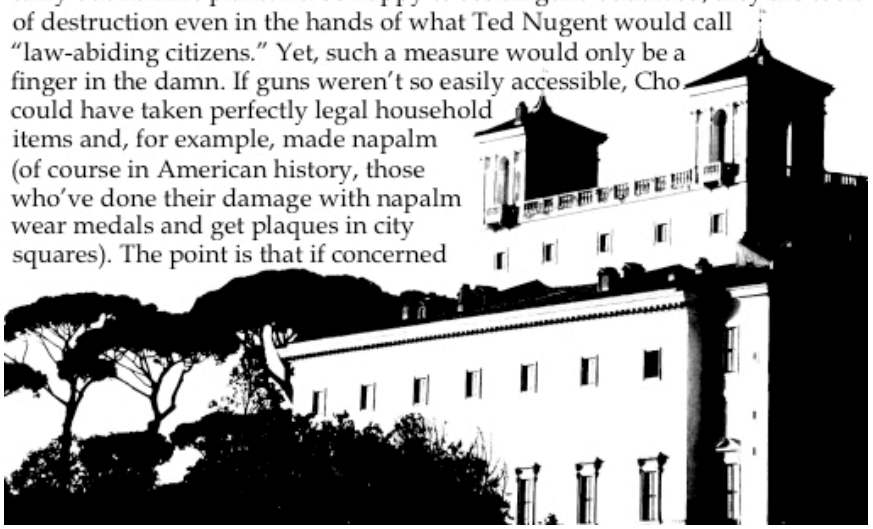
Military Inspired Violence

by Chris Kessing

While American flags swayed half-massed in the April breeze, heavy-hearted after the Virginia Tech tragedy, my mind wandered, recalling brutal images of American Wars on foreign soil, the television commercials and magazine advertisements which promote them, and our culture of death which reflects them. I question our nation's motives to make such a gesture, while continuing to spread the seeds of violence, both domestically and globally. After all, to these seeds, Seung-Hui Cho—the Virginia Tech shooter—was just a gardener.

Instinctually, concerned American citizens and political lobbyists alike will take this opportunity to evaluate the strength of gun laws, with passionate debates over the spirit of the Second Amendment, and the safety of a people. All the while, amidst the flying mud of a tire-spinning argument over means, citizens are made no safer, as the culture of violence and ambivalent attitude towards the sanctity of human life--the dangerous ends--go overwhelmingly unquestioned.

It's evident that gun laws and background checks must be strengthened to ensure mentally unstable people aren't able to obtain the tools necessary to carry out horrific plans. I'd be happy to see all guns outlawed, they are tools of destruction even in the hands of what Ted Nugent would call "law-abiding citizens." Yet, such a measure would only be a finger in the damn. If guns weren't so easily accessible, Cho could have taken perfectly legal household items and, for example, made napalm (of course in American history, those who've done their damage with napalm wear medals and get plaques in city squares). The point is that if concerned citizens wish to prevent tragedy in the future, there must be a softening of American hearts.

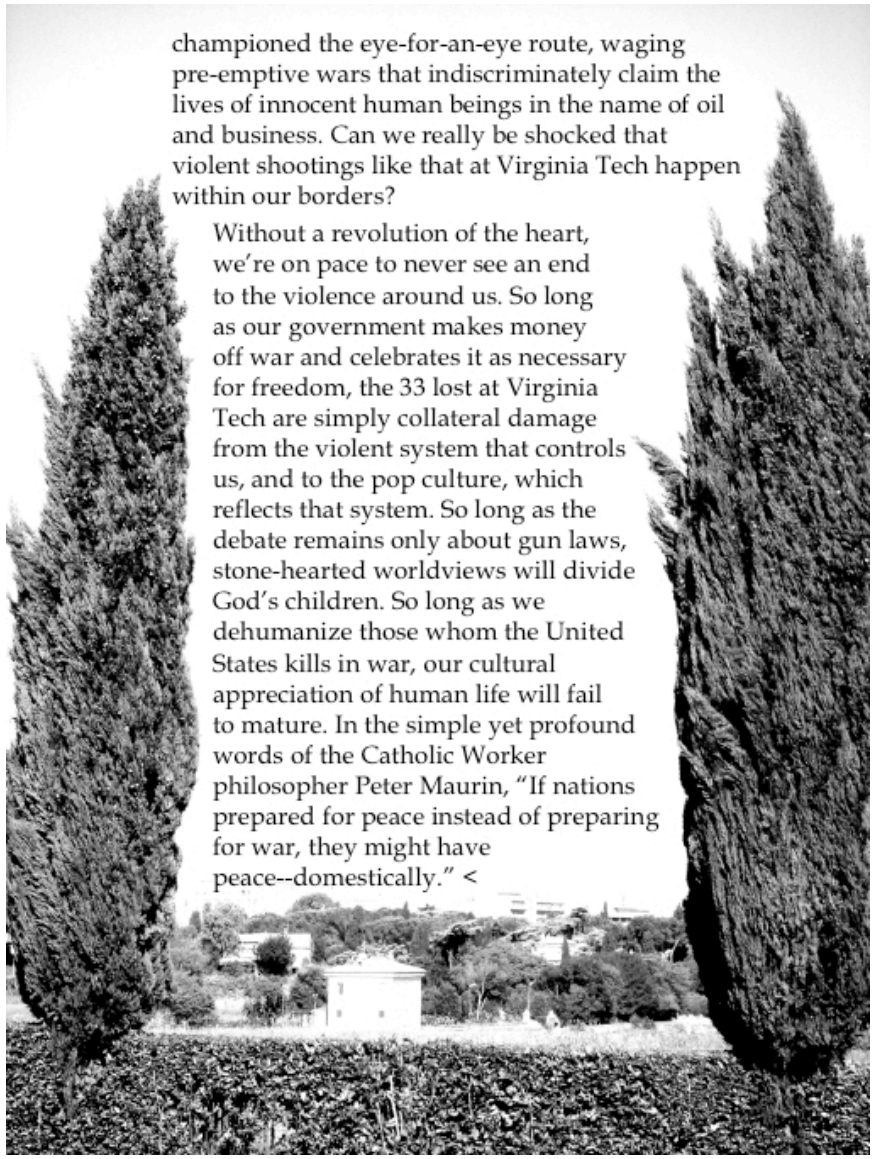


Yes, the only real solution to violence is a revolution of the heart, where Americans won't want guns in the first place, stifling the current celebration of television and videogame neo-barbarism, to a full appreciation of human life, from conception to natural death. America has here the opportunity to finally make good on the notion of being an allegedly "Christian Nation" by promoting a culture that respects life as made in the image and likeness of God. This means loving those who hate you, even people like Seung-Hui Cho (because even sinners love those who love them). This means public displays of compassion for the murdered Iraqi and Afghani civilians, valuing them as human beings. This means choosing life no matter what abortion laws allow. This means treating immigrants as friends in need, rather than criminal trespassers. This means viewing the imprisoned as God's creation and abolishing the death penalty, spitting on the notion of government-sponsored killing as "justice", and trusting our hearts rather than Washington's laws or the patriotic "freedom fighting" slogans which only illuminate the nations interest in crushing humanity.

The most dangerous hurdle for those wishing to embrace life in America is the glorification of the patriarchal "warrior," righteously merciless and all-powerful in defense of his perfect homeland. Could this possibly explain why the aggressors in such school tragedies seem to be

disproportionably male (and their victims likewise female)? All the while, adolescent boys wishing to embody all that is cool and strong gobble up the cultural stigma of non-violent action as weak, feminine and undesirable.

It would be correct but too easy to pin the responsibility of a violent culture on video games and television. Shows like *24* and games like *Halo* embrace the attitude of casual acceptance in the face of Abu-Ghraib style torture. In the same way, to pin the cultivation of violence upon the capitalist system and the businessmen who build their fortunes off these games and shows is only logical. But again, one must break the violent foundations down to their base, and realize that these militarized cultural pastimes reflect our real-life military's action and its place as a staple in the American project. Since 1896 in Nicaragua, our military has defined justice as what's done through the barrel of a gun. We've dropped bombs on all ends of the earth in the name of protecting our freedom, including the indefensible nuclear assault on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We've flexed our muscles by meddling with the political structure of El Salvador, Haiti, Chile, Guatemala, Brazil, Iran and the Dominican Republic, at times employing every violent means necessary to ensure our interests are protected. The United States is the number one exporter of weapons to the world, with the Pentagon as the intermediate negotiator. The capitalist system allows the sleaziest of war profiteering. Rather than diffuse the violence of September 11th, our government



championed the eye-for-an-eye route, waging pre-emptive wars that indiscriminately claim the lives of innocent human beings in the name of oil and business. Can we really be shocked that violent shootings like that at Virginia Tech happen within our borders?

Without a revolution of the heart, we're on pace to never see an end to the violence around us. So long as our government makes money off war and celebrates it as necessary for freedom, the 33 lost at Virginia Tech are simply collateral damage from the violent system that controls us, and to the pop culture, which reflects that system. So long as the debate remains only about gun laws, stone-hearted worldviews will divide God's children. So long as we dehumanize those whom the United States kills in war, our cultural appreciation of human life will fail to mature. In the simple yet profound words of the Catholic Worker philosopher Peter Maurin, "If nations prepared for peace instead of preparing for war, they might have peace--domestically." <

The War Prayer

By Mark Twain

It was a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism; the drums were beating, the bands playing, the toy pistols popping, the bunched firecrackers hissing and spluttering; on every hand and far down the receding and fading spread of roofs and balconies a fulttering wilderness of flags flashed in the sun; daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by; nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest deeps of their hearts, and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks all the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener.

It was indeed a glad and gracious time, and the half dozen rash spirits that ventured to disapprove of the war and cast a doubt upon its righteousness straightway got such a stern and angry warning that for their personal safety's sake they quickly shrank out of sight and offended no more in that way.

Sunday morning came -- next day the battalions would leave for the front; the church was filled; the volunteers were there, their young faces alight with martial dreams -- visions of the stern advance, the gathering momentum, the rushing charge, the flashing sabers, the flight of the foe, the tumult, the enveloping smoke, the fierce pursuit, the surrender!

Then home from the war, bronzed heroes, welcomed, adored, submerged in golden seas of glory! With the volunteers sat their dear ones, proud, happy, and envied by the neighbors and friends who had no sons and brothers to send forth to the field of honor, there to win for the flag, or, failing, die the noblest of noble deaths. The service proceeded; a war chapter from the Old Testament was read; the first prayer was said; it was followed by an organ burst that shook the building, and with one impulse the house rose, with glowing eyes and beating hearts, and poured out that tremendous invocation:

God the all-terrible! Thou who ordainest,
Thunder thy clarion and lightning thy sword!

Then came the "long" prayer. None could remember the like of it for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language. The burden of its supplication was, that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory --

An aged stranger entered and moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle, his eyes fixed upon the minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, his head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders, his seamy face unnaturally pale, pale even to ghastliness. With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way; without pausing, he ascended to the preacher's side and stood there waiting. With shut lids the preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in fervent appeal, "Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord and God, Father and Protector of our land and flag!"

The stranger touched his arm, motioned him to step aside -- which the startled minister did -- and took his place. During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes, in which burned an uncanny light; then in a deep voice he said:

"I come from the Throne -- bearing a message from Almighty God!" The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention. "He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it if such be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import -- that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of -- except he pause and think. "God's servant and yours has prayed his prayer.

Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two -- one uttered, and the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this -- keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon your neighbor at the same time. If you pray for the blessing of rain on your crop which needs it, by that act you are possibly praying for a curse on some neighbor's crop which may not need rain and can be injured by it.

"You have heard your servant's prayer -- the uttered part of it. I am commissioned by God to put into words the other part of it -- that part which the pastor -- and also you in your hearts -- fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard the words 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. The whole of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results, which follow victory -- must follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

"Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth into battle -- be Thou near them! With them -- in spirit -- we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended in the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames in summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it –

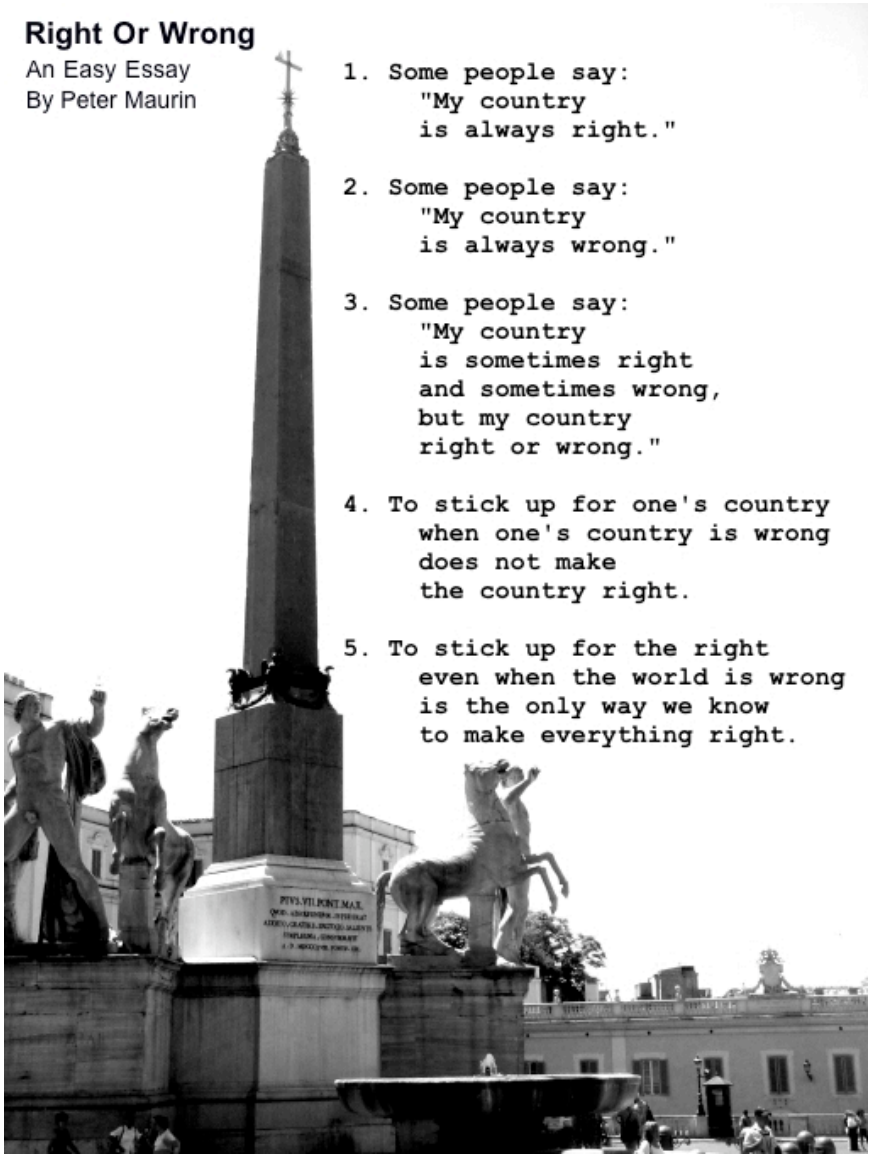
For our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet!

We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

(After a pause.) "Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The messenger of the Most High waits."

...

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said. <



America, your system has failed you.

By Chris Rooney

These are the words that have been haunting my mind since learning that the new Congress--the one that a majority of you believed would de-fund the war and bring the troops home; the one the hacks in the press touted as having a "clear mandate from the American people"; the one we all hung our hopes on; has agreed to continue bankrolling the Apocalypse. In this editorial I want to write something about faith and how easily it can be misplaced.

You and I had faith that something very positive would result from removing the snakes that made up your past government. To your credit, you went to the polls believing that by casting your vote you would register your dissatisfaction with things like the soft treason of the Valerie Plame affair, and the money laundering of crooks like Tom Delay. Even after your new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, stated that Congress would not pursue articles of impeachment against the pseudo-fascists in your Executive branch, I was still willing to give them the benefit of the doubt and often argued in their defense. I was wrong in my lack of foresight, this is only a taste of the collapse of your government and it's constitutional duty to represent *you, the voter*. If you are holding your breath and crossing your fingers that Barak Obama, or Hillary Clinton, or John McCain will somehow reach in and fish your country out of the sewers then you need a strong dose of coffee.

The writing is on the wall America, and this time it's brought to you by Pepsi and Haliburton and The Project for the New American Century.

In the first paragraph I said I wanted to talk about misplaced faith. You have placed your faith in a machine, the machine of government. Yours was born out of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The Founding Fathers of your country lead a revolt against the very abuses you are now eagerly allowing. One of them, I believe it was Jefferson, said--in what has become an oft quoted phrase--"Those who would trade liberty for security deserve neither". Let me unfold this analogy: you have been entrusted with a machine, a system that was created for more or less benevolent purposes by intelligent people. This machine functioned well enough for the last two hundred years but now this, your system of

government, has turned on you and the whole world. The robot has escaped from the lab. Hitler and the Nazis had their own 9/11 to gain power, it was called the Reichstag fire, and they blamed it on the Jews and the Communists. The Neo-Cons in your government are blaming the Muslims and Terrorists. It is the very same song just with new verses. Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib will not go away, the Democrats won't send more troops home except in flag draped pine boxes. We have come to this point because of our collective and unwavering faith in a system, a system which has been rendered meaningless to everyone except for the people who can abuse it.

The Roman Empire was a Republic and a Democracy, it had it's own providentially endorsed rulers and it's own Imperial cult. It too was fighting wars of conquest in the middle east. The Roman Empire fell, and it fell because the people put their faith in everything and everyone except the One who matters. Is this some false-Christian appeal for Theocracy? Hardly, I am a firm believer in the separation of church from state. What I'm saying is that "state" is the problem, whether it looks like the Vatican or whether it looks like the Beltway in the end it's the same. God on the other hand is beyond all attempts to replace Him with a system. God has set us all the task of creating a loving world in which to live. His teachings are right there in books like the Septuagint, the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran. There are reflections of these truths in all of the world's great religions. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, tried to make it as easy to understand and as hard to argue against as possible: "Love one another." "Love your God with all your heart and Love your neighbour as yourself." "Upon this" He said "rests all the law and the prophets". A careful reading of the Old Testament proves Him to be completely right. So stop trying to convince yourself that the system will save you because these damn systems are killing us all. And stop hoping that some day somebody else is going to hand you peace on a silver platter. There might be pie in the sky when you die, but to sit here and starve to death in anticipation—or worse still, to participate in the murder of the planet so as to get a slice—is a gross and immoral perversion of the Faith that God gave us.

When He returns in His glory will he find a lot of miss-led Christians praying for the system to save them? Or will He return to His Kingdom already prepared in anticipation by people who decided, seriously, to love each other? <

We Believe So We Speak
2nd Corinthians 4:13

J. Barrett Lee is a graduate of Regent College in Vancouver, BC. He currently lives in central New York with his wife Sarah, a Presbyterian minister, and works at the Rescue Mission of Utica. Barrett is also an Inquirer to Holy Orders in the Free Episcopal Church, an inclusive, independent Anglican denomination. www.free-episcopal.org

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Steven Woods is currently serving a death sentence at a state prison in Texas. He has a blog at www.anarchyinchains.com and more writing at www.drivemovement.org If you would like to write to Steven you can send mail to Steven Woods #999427 Polunsky Unit 3872 FM 350 S Livingston, TX 77351.

Chris Kessing lives in Andover Conneticut and is working on a degree in political science and theology, after graduation he plans on joining a Catholic Worker community and has hopes of starting one of his own one day.

Peter Maurin b. May 9, 1877 d. 1949 was visionary and co-founder with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement. He lived his whole life in holy poverty and though he never wrote a book of his own his “Easy Essays” form a prominent cornerstone of the movement’s philosophy.

All of the photos in this issue were all taken by Chris Rooney while in Rome, Italy in May of 2007. Other artists featured here are Ade Bethune, Kevin Larimee, and Josina De Bree, all uncredited art was taken from the internet using google image searches and hopefully constitutes fair use.

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Chris Rooney,
and Karl Germyn